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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001254

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS AND SCA/RA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/10/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: MALDIVES: RESIGNED MINISTERS CONTINUE REFORM
EFFORTS; NEW FM PLEDGES SUPPORT FOR REFORM

REF: A. COLOMBO 1216
[1](#)B. COLOMBO 1186
[1](#)C. COLOMBO 1166
[1](#)D. COLOMBO 1161
[1](#)E. COLOMBO 1087

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Former Foreign Minister Ahmed Shaheed, Justice Minister Mohamed Jameel, and Attorney General Hassan Saeed, the key advocates for reform within the Government until their resignations last month (refs d and e), are reportedly considering joining the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). In a meeting on September 5, Shaheed, Jameel, and Saeed assured Ambassador that they will continue to actively pursue democratic progress from the opposition. Saeed and Shaheed recommended an independent assessment of Maldives' reform progress and a conference on democracy with broad multi-party participation. Shaheed noted that the August 18 referendum has significantly altered the political landscape in Maldives. The opposition has been discredited by its own claim that the referendum would be a vote of confidence on Gayoom, and the political fortunes of Gayoom's half-brother Yameen were dashed when the parliamentary system lost. On September 6, Ambassador met with Foreign Minister Shahid, who said the Maldivian government is ready to move forward with its reform program. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Former Foreign Minister Ahmed Shaheed, Justice Minister Mohamed Jameel, and Attorney General Hassan Saeed, the key advocates for reform within the Government until their resignations last month (refs d and e), are reportedly considering joining the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). Local press and MDP contacts tell us that Shaheed, Saeed, and Jameel, as well as Agriculture Minister Hussain Hilmy, are currently engaged in discussions with MDP Chairperson Mohamed Nasheed over what positions they would get in a future MDP government. (Note: Hilmy reportedly plans to resign from the Government in the near future.) MDP contacts tell us there is some resistance within the party to accepting the four, but most feel it would be good for the party. Saeed has popular support within Addu Atoll and Jameel can carry voters in Fua Mulaku Island. Shaheed, although generally unpopular with Maldivians because of his

father's reputation for corruption, is well-liked within the international community.

¶3. (C) On September 5, Ambassador met with Shaheed, Jameel, and Saeed who assured him that they will continue to actively pursue democratic progress from the opposition. They also informed Ambassador of an upcoming UN assessment on what Maldives needs to do to prepare for its presidential election in 2008. They reported that the UN is waiting for the Government to set a date for the assessment team's visit and asked that the U.S. urge the Government to set this date soon. Ambassador promised the Embassy would do so.

¶4. (C) Saeed noted President Gayoom's argument that he needs one more term in office to finish implementing the reform agenda. However, Saeed thought the contrary: as long as Gayoom remains in office, the reformers will get weaker and the hardliners will get stronger. Saeed recommended an independent assessment of Maldives' reform progress, an "audit" of what has been accomplished, what remains to be done, and why it has not yet been done. For his part, he said, he is preparing a document to explain to the international community what reforms remain and how they can be achieved in the next year.

¶5. (C) Shaheed and Saeed suggested other steps toward reform, including selecting a more independent election commissioner and encouraging the Government to adhere to its promise to participate in Commonwealth-sponsored talks with the opposition after the referendum. They also plan to arrange a conference on democracy with broad multi-party participation.

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¶6. (C) Shaheed noted that the August 18 referendum has significantly altered the political landscape in Maldives. He said the opposition has dug itself into a hole by characterizing the referendum as a vote of confidence on Gayoom. Now that the results are in, and Gayoom's preferred system of government won, the opposition finds itself discredited. Shaheed said Gayoom sees a better chance for his own re-election now that the MDP has "self-destructed." Shaheed also noted that Gayoom does not see the referendum results as a mandate for reform, but rather a mandate for him. He is unlikely to implement his Roadmap to Reform, said Shaheed, because once he does, his ability to influence the outcome of the next Presidential election will be limited.

¶7. (C) Shaheed explained that the referendum destroyed the political fortunes of Gayoom's half-brother Yameen, who was leading a breakaway faction of the ruling party. Yameen aspired to become Prime Minister under a parliamentary system, he said, in large part because he knows he could never generate enough popular support to win a direct presidential election. With these hopes dashed, he will now look to get back into politics by rejoining Gayoom's government. Shaheed commented that the return of the hardline Yameen to the Government would further delay the reform process.

¶8. (C) On September 6, Ambassador met with new Foreign Minister Abdullah Shahid and urged that the Maldivian Government implement the President's Roadmap for Reform and schedule a date for the UN assessment team so preparations for the 2008 election can begin. Shahid said the Maldivian government is ready to move forward with its reform program. He noted that the Human Rights Commission, despite its reputation for siding with the opposition, had endorsed the referendum results. He acknowledged the slow pace of the Special Majlis on drafting the new constitution and blamed a continual lack of quorum. He said the President had personally called MDP Chairperson Nasheed to urge the MDP to cooperate on finishing the constitution.

¶9. (C) COMMENT: The addition of the "New Maldives" group to

the MDP could lend needed credibility to the MDP and reinvigorate the party. A key question will be where the three former ministers fit in the MDP leadership structure and who would serve as the MDP candidate for President if elections are held. Regardless of whether they join the MDP, the resigned reformers seem sincere about remaining engaged in the reform process, and are being proactive in generating new ideas to achieve progress. Many observers remain worried about the future of the reform movement following their resignation, however. The new foreign minister, while lacking the reformist credentials of his predecessor, is so far saying all the right things.

BLAKE